



National Coalition for the Homeless

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Fact Sheet and Lesson Plan for Sixth-Eighth Grade Students

What is the Definition of Homelessness?

The McKinney Act, a bill that was introduced to Congress in 1994, came up with the criteria that a person must meet in order for them to be considered homeless by the government. According to the Act, a person is considered homeless if they do not have a permanent residence and/or if their nighttime residence is a shelter or a government run facility.

Statistics:

According to a study done by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty done in 2007, 3.5 million people (1.35 million of them children) are likely to experience homelessness in a given year.

A study done by the US Conference of Mayors in 2007 reported that the homeless population is estimated to be comprised of 42% African American, 39% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 4% Native American, and 2% Asian.

A 2004 study done by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty showed that in almost every city surveyed (there were about 50 in the study) the number of homeless people exceeded the available amount of emergency shelter and transitional housing facilities.

What Are The Causes of Homelessness?

People are homeless for many different reasons. Many homeless people do not make enough money to pay rent even if they work every single day. Some homeless people even work two minimum wage jobs and still do not have enough money to afford rent. In addition, many people are homeless because there are not as many jobs available. Others are homeless because they have a disability and can't work or take care of themselves and they can't afford the proper treatment or medication to help them. Every person who experiences homelessness is different, and the reasons for why they are homeless are as varied as they are.

What Is Being Done To End Homelessness?

There are some federal programs that address the issue of homelessness and work to get homeless people off the streets and into a home of their own. There are three main services that the government offers that help homeless people find housing.

1. **Section 8/Public Housing:** The Section 8 program provides assistance to people living in privately owned apartments by allowing the person to pay 30% of their income towards the rent and have the government pay the rest. Public Housing does the same thing except it's for people living in housing provided for by the government.
2. **HUD Homeless Assistance Grants:** The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) helps to fund programs that work towards ending homelessness. They also provide money for shelters, transitional housing, and other services that homeless people need.
3. **Health Care for the Homeless:** A program that provides the health care services to the homeless in an affordable way so that the person can receive care that they would otherwise not be able to get because they can't afford it.

What Can I Do?

There are so many ways that you can help end homelessness. Some of the things that you and your class can do are:

1. Volunteer in a soup kitchen
2. Host a clothing drive and collect clothing from friends and family and donate it to a shelter
3. Write to your Congressman or Senator and urge them to support laws that will help homeless people
4. Teach your friends about homelessness. Use what you learned from this fact sheet and your own research and help your friends understand the serious issue of homelessness in the United States.
5. Tutor children at a local shelter or transitional housing facility
6. Donate school supplies to a shelter

Activities for Teachers/Leaders

1. Myth Vs. Fact

Have your students identify which statements are myths and which are facts. The answers are written below. After the students complete the assignment, facilitate a discussion about their findings and whether they were surprised by the answers.

Myth or Fact? Homeless people could get jobs, they are just too lazy or don't want to work.

Answer: MYTH! Most homeless people are incredibly hard-working and often have more than one job but still can't afford to pay rent.

Myth or Fact? Homelessness is too big of an issue for me to help solve, there is no real solution.

Answer: MYTH! There are lots of ways that you can help the homeless. Something as small as smiling at a homeless person on the street or giving some spare change to something as big as donating clothes or school supplies or writing your Congressman are all great ways to help.

Myth or Fact? The Council for Affordable and Rural Housing estimates that 9% of the US homeless population is in rural areas.

Answer: FACT! Many of these rural areas do not have the same kinds of services that a big city might have, so homeless people are forced to live in crowded, temporary arrangements. In a study done by the Department of Education in 2000, only 35% of them lived in shelters, 34% lived doubled-up with family or friends, and 23% lived in motels or other locations.

Myth or Fact? Mental illness is a major cause of homelessness.

Answer: FACT! Many people experiencing some form of mental illness cannot work efficiently so they lose their jobs. As a result, they can't afford to pay the rent anymore and end up living on the streets. They are unable to afford health care or services that would help them with their illness so often times it goes untreated and just gets worse.

2. Organize a Clothing/Food Drive

Materials Needed: Paper, Markers, Cardboard Box, Number for a Homeless Shelter in your area

Have the students make a list of all the things that they could give to a homeless person. The list should include clothing, canned goods, books and school supplies

Send a letter home with each student explaining that your class is having a food/clothing drive and you will be collecting items to donate to a homeless shelter. Have the students bring in items throughout the week and put them in a cardboard box.

Bring the box to a local homeless shelter or food bank and drop off the items

3. Organize a Speakers Panel

The National Coalition for the Homeless has a Speakers Bureau that consists of formerly homeless or homeless individuals who come to speak to groups about their experiences. Contact Michael O'Neill, Speakers Bureau director at 202-462-4822 ext. 222 for more information.

Sources:

1. National Alliance to End Homelessness, A Homelessness Fact sheet for Middle School Students, www.endhomelessness.org.
- 2 .National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet #2, How Many People Experience Homelessness? www.nationalhomeless.org
3. National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet #19, How YOU Can Help End Homelessness, www.nationalhomeless.org

